

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Toys for Tots Program and an Exchange With Reporters at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia
December 12, 2022

The President. When I was that age, I could hardly say my name in public. *[Laughter]* Actually, I used to stutter when I was a little boy, until I was in high school. It's the only thing everybody—anyway. You're a very impressive child.

The First Lady. Yes.

The President. Thank you.

Good afternoon. And, Samara, thank you for everything. And kids like you are the reason why I've never been so optimistic about our country. Think about it.

I just have one request: When you're President of the United States and they say that Joe Biden is in the outer office, promise me you won't say to your staff, "Joe who?" *[Laughter]* Will—you'll remember me? All right. Okay. That's all I ask. *[Laughter]*

I also want to thank General Bellon for welcoming us today. And I told him he and I have something in common: We both married way above our station. Mrs. Bellon, it's a pleasure to see you.

And, Lieutenant General Laster, you truly exemplify the Marine motto, "Always"—"Always Faithful." Over 38 years of service in uniform and 4 more leading Toys for Tots, I want to thank you as well for not walking away.

Folks, it's an honor to be with you celebrating the 75th anniversary of this incredible cause. And it is an incredible cause.

Toys for Tots is one of the best events of the year at the White House. We set up donation boxes everywhere. And last week, one of the collection boxes in the Eisenhower building had things—a huge thing—stuffed animals, a smiling toy bunny perched on the edge. You can't see something like that without smiling. And that's what you all do.

For 75 years, you've brought joy and laughter and smiles to families all across this country. Last year alone, you collected 22 million toys for more than 8 million children, giving Santa a run for his money. And—but unlike Santa, you don't wear big red suits. You don't travel the world in just 1 night. Instead, you wear dress blues and Army greens. And as marines, soldiers, sailors, you stand watch around the world every single night.

As Jill mentioned, we have a "We the Children's" room at the White House. And one of the pieces of this year's broader holiday theme is "We the People," when you come to the White House. Those are the very first words of our Constitution, I say to all the adults. They're the very idea of America. And in "We the People," we see you and the best of us, the women and men who gave everything to our country and give back to our communities. You aren't just the heart and soul of our Nation, you're the very spine of our Nation. And we owe you.

In "We the People," we also see all the spouses, partners, and children here today. Jill and I know how much you give to our Nation and how much you sacrifice. The English poet John Milton once wrote, "They also serve who only stand and wait." And it's true. We know that for those of you with husbands, wives, moms, dads, friends, loved ones deployed overseas, it can be extra tough this time of year.

When our son Beau was deployed in Iraq for a year, it was hard to look at that empty seat at the dinner table every night, particularly on the holidays. And for our granddaughters and grandson—they were the same age as many of you here today—it was even harder not to have their dad around on Christmas morning. So I want to tell you what I told them: You have to keep brave—you have to be brave. Even when your mommies and daddies are far away, they are so proud of you.

And I'm so proud of you, as your President. All of you here today, you all give back. You're helping other people, other kids, just like your parents are helping. And sometimes, just a little bit of help can change everything for someone.

I think about the story that Toys for Tots shared of a young girl, only 9 years old, who fled violence from Nicaragua to come to the United States with her family. It about 35 years ago. Her parents had saved all the pennies they were able to get here. And they told her, "Christmas isn't going to happen this year," when she arrived, 35 years ago.

But then one morning, a big Toys for Tots truck pulled up to her new home in San Jose. Marines hopped out, and she got to pick a gift. You know what she picked? A huge stuffed bunny. She used it as a pillow.

That little girl grow—grew up to join the United States Marine Corps. She served our country in uniform for 26 years. She's now a major in the Marine Corps. I wish she could be here today, but she's on Active Duty.

But she still remembers that first Christmas in the United States, and she shared her story with Toys for Tots, because this program gives so much more than just gifts. It gives hope. You give community. And you are the inspiration that lasts a lifetime. And that's not hyperbole. You know it to be true in your gut. You've seen it in the face of—the looks of these children.

So all of you kids, keep it up. Keep on being brave. Keep on being involved. Keep on helping other people.

And may God bless you all. You have a merry Christmas. And may God protect our troops.

Now let's get sorting these gifts. Okay? You with me? All right.

[At this point, the President helped sort gifts and greeted Toys for Tots volunteers. He then responded to a question from a reporter as follows.]

Ukraine

Q. Are you sending U.S. troops to Ukraine?

The President. Are we sending troops to Ukraine?

Q. Yes.

The President. No. We're sending material like we have. Billions of dollars' worth.

Q. Mr. President, will you veto the NDAA since it repeals the vaccine mandate?

[The President resumed sorting gifts and greeting volunteers.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:51 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Samara Donahue, daughter of Col. Shane Donahue, USMC, who introduced the President; Lt. Gen. David G. Bellon, USMC, commander, U.S. Marine Forces South and U.S. Marine Forces Reserve, and his wife Susan; Lt. Gen. James B. Laster, USMC (Ret.), president and chief executive officer, Marine Toys for Tots Foundation; and Maj. Mariela Pena, USMC, who received a gift from Toys for

Tots as a child. He also referred to his grandchildren Natalie, Naomi, Finnegan, Roberta, and Hunter Biden. A reporter referred to the National Defense Authorization Act.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Toys for Tots program, 75th anniversary celebration at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, VA; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, VA.

Locations: Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, VA.

Names: Bellon, David G.; Bellon, Susan; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Naomi K.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. "Maisy"; Donahue, Samara; Laster, James B.; Pena, Mariela.

Subjects: Christmas; Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia; Marine Corps, U.S.; Toys for Tots program; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication; Ukraine, U.S. assistance; Virginia, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall; Virginia, President's visits.

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